

[Early Oregoniana and Local Sayings]

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Title Early Oregonianas and local sayings

Place of origin Portland, Oreg. Date 1/13/39

Project worker Sara B. Wrenn

Project editor

Remarks

Form A

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Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date January 13, 1939.

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon (Project Office)

Subject Early Oregoniana and Local Sayings.

Name and address of informant Miss Mertie Stevens 603 Sixth Street, Oregon City, Oregon.

Date and time of interview January 10, 1939. 10 to 12 noon.

Place of interview Home of informant.

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant Dr. Pierce, a fellow worker of the Federal Writers' Project, Portland.

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you —

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. A large, well-kept tea-room house, with surrounding garden. The interview took place in the living-room, big and high-ceilinged and well furnished in the period of some 25 years ago. Everything was in immaculate order, not only in the living-room, but in all the rooms adjoining — parlor or reception room, dining-room, bedroom and kitchen: even down in the basement, where the informant has the

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nucleus of an early-day museum, the windows of which are iron-barred, since she lives in this big house entirely alone.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date January 13, 1939

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Early Oregoniana and Local Sayings.

Name and address of informant Miss Mertie Stevens 603 Sixth Street, Oregon City, Oregon.

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry
2. Place and date of birth
3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates
5. Education, with dates

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6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates

7. Special skills and interests

8. Community and religious activities

9. Description of informant

10. Other points gained in interview

1. Scotch, Irish, English and Indian.

2. Oregon City. Date of birth refused. Probably about 1880.

3. Father, Harley C. Stevens. Mother, Mary Crawford Stevens. Granddaughter of Capt. Medorum Crawford, early U. S. Military Escort and pioneer of 1842.

4. Oregon City, Oregon, always.

5. Public Schools, Oregon City.

6. Always lived at home. "No parlor tricks."

7. No special skills. Church and civic interests.

8. Congregational Church, and the social life of a small town.

9. Medium sized, with brown, graying hair, parted in the middle with a little curl at each temple. Neatly dressed. Somewhat prim. More of the late Victorian than modern type, with a slight catch of words in her speech.

10. Miss Stevens would seem to be more interested in acquiring and possessing early Northwest Americana, than history of folklore.

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Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date January 13, 1939.

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Pioneer reminiscences, incidents, etc.

Name and address of informant Miss Mertie Stevens. 603 Sixth Street, Oregon City, Oregon.

Text:

I don't know. I'm afraid I can't tell you very much. I can't think of anything just now. Yes, Grandfather Crawford was captain in the early military escort across the plains. There's a diary of his in either the University of Oregon or the Oregon State College, I don't remember which. There are a lot of old papers and manuscripts and maybe a diary boxed away in the attic, but I haven't time to get them down. I'm a very busy person. There's so much to do, just twittering around. I want to show you around to see my things. Some of these things came from China and some are old pioneer things I've picked up. When we've looked at these we'll go down to the basement. Keep your coat on, it's cold down there. Watch your step now, the stairs are steep. These Indian baskets along the wall here are old. That is an old Indian cooking basket; it would hold water if it were soaked up. See the little designs on it, they all mean something, but I don't know what. The beads in this

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basket are some my father secured after the big flood of the Willamette in 1861, when a lot of Indian graves were washed out. Some of these are Hudson Bay Company beads, the kind they traded to the Indians for furs, and some of them —the dark blue ones I think — are beads said to have been used in trading by Lewis and Clark. The basket is full, you see, of many sorts of 2 necklets, etc., said to have been used at a very early day by various fur traders and early explorers. Father had them all labelled once, but they are all mixed up now. Some day, maybe, I'll find somebody who knows something about them and can straighten them out. Yes, it's too bad to have their history lost. These snuff boxes belonged to my grandmother Brown, who crossed the plains in 1842. This tortoise shell one was evidently her dress-up, go-to-meeting snuff box, and this little round paper mache one, that is so worn it hardly shows the picture on top, must have been the one she used at home. See, it has a little snuff in it yet.

Who made that composite picture of steel engravings? Grandmother Stevens amused herself making that. No, it doesn't mean anything. This long cap-gun was one of my grandfather Medorum Crawford's, and this big, old army rifle is one he used on the Plains. And here are his saddle bags and the various leather boxes and bags for his accoutrement. That heavy iron chest was used by him, and this stout leathern satchel-like thing is what he is supposed to have carried the money in to pay off his men. I'm sorry I haven't any stories about them to tell you.

That old iron lantern up there is one my mother carried to light her on the way to prayer meeting. It was a long time before they had any street lights in Oregon City. Father and mother belonged to the Congregational Church, founded here in 1844, and built in 1850. Before the church was built they met around at various homes.

Quilting Bees? My stars, yes, there were lots of quilting bees in the early days, but I don't remember anything about them. Yes, and there were plenty of revivals and camp meetings too, but being Congregationalists we never went. I've heard them tell about them though; where they would get excited and “filled with the spirit.” There was one woman mother

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used to tell about. She always had 3 a baby on her arm. She was always one to sort of lead the excitement. When the meeting would get well under way, with everybody getting filled with the spirit, she would turn suddenly to her meek little husband, holding out the baby to him and shouting, "Here, pa, you hold Johnny while I go to Glory!" And then she would begin to yell, "Glory! Glory! Everybody come to Glory!" until she got everybody well started up to the mourners' bench.

They used to have some funny phrases that I remember mother telling. I suppose it was the slang of that day. One of them, evidently derisive, was "There goes —. She looks like she had been beaten through hell with a soot bag."

Another, of somebody "putting on airs." "There she (or he) goes, head up and tail arisin". And here are some more:

Full of pep: "I'm up and acomin' like a burnt boot."

Controversial fine point: "That's like splitting a hair and splitting the splits."

Concerning waste, like throwing away food: "You'll see the time when you'll follow the crows a mile for that."

On indecision: or delayed enthusiasm: "Don't be like Elam Barsley's sow — pulled on with the head and off with the tail."

This was a purely local saying. Elam Barsley had a sow that refused to go to the trough to eat with the other pigs, but once they got her there, they had to pull her away.

Another, on unsolicited aid was: "Proffered service always stinks." That sounds something like one of Benjamin Franklin's sayings.

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Though women didn't have the right to vote in the early times, mother 4 used to tell of how they dreaded election days; when all the men would be gone to the polls and the Indians would come about, scaring them half to death. The Indians never harmed them, she said, never-the-less, the women folk were afraid of them.

Form D

Extra Comment

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date January 13, 1939,

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Early Oregoniana and Local Sayings.

Name and address of informant Miss Mertie Stevens 603 Sixth St., Oregon City Oregon.

Comment:

It would seem from Miss Stevens' antecedents and her interest in the material things of early Oregon that she would have more of a knowledge of pioneer life and folklore, and the interviewer is inclined to think that an intimate acquaintance or old friend would be able to obtain more information. It will be noted that she mentions diaries and manuscripts in existence but, though the interviewer called on appointment, the informant seemed to have

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social engagements, with a good deal of “twittering about,” as she expressed it. This left the impression much remained untold when the interview ended.